

The Hackney Terrier

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The Friends of Hackney Archives Newsletter

Spring 2006



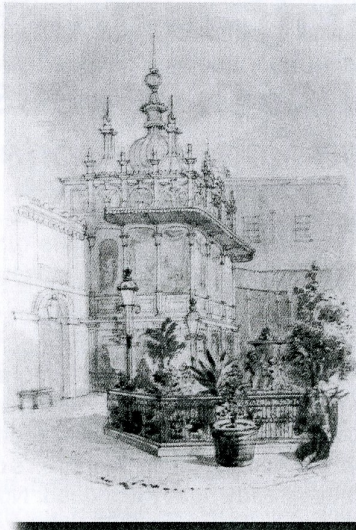
Open Day

On Saturday 8th April, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., Hackney Archives is holding an Open Day - an opportunity to meet new staff and explore our collections and publications for sale. The day will launch a new exhibition on the history of theatre in the borough, from Shakespeare to the present. Here is a preview of some of the theatres featured in the exhibition.

The Grecian Theatre

The Eagle Pub in Shepherdess Walk, off City Road, marks the site of the 18th century Shepherd and Shepherdess pleasure garden. This was transformed during the 1820s into the Eagle Tavern whose lawn was the scene for balloon ascents, wrestling and stick-fights. In the

early 1830s the Grecian Saloon was added to the tavern, offering a variety of musical concerts ranging from religious Lenten performances and operas rivalling Sadlers Wells, alongside conjuring acts and 'the lady on the elastic cord'. The Grecian survived until the end of the 19th



century, and is remembered for the debut of the 15-year-old future queen of the music halls, Marie Lloyd. A rebuilt Eagle pub still stands, famous as being the place where local leather workers would pawn - 'pop' - their tools - 'weasels' - for the price of a drink (according to one interpretation of the nursery rhyme). Much of the site of the Grecian Theatre and the pleasure gardens is now covered by a police station; a relic of these is the pub's beer garden.

The Britannia



Another theatre which had its origin in a saloon was the Britannia, founded by Samuel Lane in 1841. The first building, for an audience of about a thousand, was built in the grounds of the Britannia Tavern in Hoxton Street. It was not only a variety theatre, but even in its early days put on classical drama and Shakespeare. In 1843 Sallie Barrow appeared at the theatre under her stage name of Sara Wilton; in the following year she was principal boy in the first of the Britannia's famous pantomimes. She soon married Sam Lane, their partnership founding the famous theatrical family of Lanes and Lupinos. In 1850 the theatre was enlarged to seat another 500 people.

However 8 years later the whole structure was demolished and a new theatre built. It consisted of two tiers of circle, as well as pit and gallery. Designed to seat 3,200 people, it eventually held many more. The record attendance was reputed to be 4,790. In 1871 Samuel Lane died, and the management of the theatre was carried on by his wife Sara. However she was not as successful, and the theatre began to decline. She engaged her nephew, Alfred Lane Crauford, as manager in 1881, and for a while the theatre experienced renewed success. Sara Lane's final performance was in December 1881 at the age of 76; a testimonial to her (now in the possession of the Garrick Club) was signed by 108 employees. Sara died on 19 August 1899 and her funeral was a major spectacle in Shoreditch. The Britannia was left to A.L. Crauford and his brother, but its heyday was over. More stringent safety requirements meant that expensive alterations to the theatre were necessary. At the same time the cinema was growing as an attraction. The lease was sold in 1902. It was later held by George Conquest, who produced a number of spectacles there including the celebrated "Forty Thieves" in 1910. The theatre was taken over by the Gaumont cinema organisation, ultimately being destroyed in the Blitz.

The Alexandra Theatre

The Alexandra Theatre in Stoke Newington Road was opened on 27 December 1897 with Mr F.W. Purcell as owner and manager. The building was designed by Frank Matcham, the well-known Victorian theatre designer who also designed the Hackney Empire. In December 1906 the theatre closed, re-opening the same month as the Palace Theatre of Varieties under the directorship of Mr Albert Gilmer. In September 1907 a new company, known as Stoke



Newington Theatre Ltd, was formed. It continued as a variety house until March 1909, reverting to a theatre under the management of Oswald Stoll. In May 1917 it became a cinema. Under new management in October 1920 the policy of the theatre changed again and revues, comedies and thrillers were produced as well as annual pantomimes. In January 1931 the theatre was acquired by a syndicate, Standard Cinema Properties Ltd, and alterations were made to make it suitable for "talkies". During the thirties the theatre continued to show films as well as producing variety shows, reviews and pantomimes. The war years saw the theatre being used for a variety of different purposes, including as a boxing booth, under the management of Jack Solomons. On 8th October 1945 it was re-opened as a theatre under the control of Mr P.W. Spellman. In April 1948 the theatre was sold to the New Yiddish Theatre Company with Abraham Adolph Dubens as principal director. The building was condemned in December 1948 owing to bomb damage, and closed. It re-opened in January 1949, and productions at the theatre continued until October 1950, when it permanently closed. The building was subsequently demolished.

Staff, restructuring and premises - Ted Rogers reports

Staff News

We were very pleased to welcome Sally England back in December after her illness. Friends will be glad to hear that she is feeling very much better. However, also in December our temporary Administrative Assistant, Fran Prah, left to further her career as an accountant. Libby Adams, Elizabeth Green and Sally have temporarily taken over Fran's duties, thus adding to their already heavy workload. Nor have I been able to assist as much as I should have liked due to my commitments elsewhere in the wider library service. I would like to thank the archives team for rising to the occasion as they have done many times in the past.

The efforts of staff have been reflected in the results of a survey of visitors which we carried out in December. 93% of respondents rated the service as good or very good overall, with a 100% score for the helpfulness and knowledge of the staff. Visitors

were less happy with some aspects of our service, in particular our building and our catalogues. We will be holding another, similar survey in the next few weeks. For those of you who understandably are feeling survey fatigue, please bear with us as in these days of 'evidence based' decisions, feedback like this can lead to extra resources.

Restructuring

The restructure of the Archives Service, which I mentioned in the last Terrier, is now well under way. Sally is now confirmed in her new, permanent post of Local Studies Librarian, and will be working four days a week, dividing her time between the local studies collection, outreach and helping the public. We have also been successful in appointing to the two new posts in the new, improved structure. Nora Dunn will be starting as Administrative & Finance Officer from 13th March, and Siân Mogridge will be our new Archivist from mid April. The next Terrier will no doubt include autobiographies, so I won't steal their thunder here. The standard of applications for both jobs was extraordinarily high, and the response almost overwhelming – for Nora's job we received 83 application forms. Libby and Elizabeth will continue in their current roles, although, I hope, not quite so overloaded as in recent months.

With our new team we will be able to provide an enhanced level of service. Of most interest to the Friends, I suspect, are increased public opening hours which will come into effect from May. From then, we will be opening Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week plus Friday morning. Additionally we will be opening until 8pm every Tuesday and until 5:30pm on Wednesday and Thursday. Some Friends have asked me about the possibility of remaining open over lunchtime or on Saturdays – Libby and I have looked into this in some detail but given our present circumstances and building, such a change would pose grave operational difficulties. However, we will keep the situation under review. Similarly we will be monitoring the use of our late evenings – as they say 'use it or lose it'!

Premises

On the premises front, things have also been moving rapidly. As many of you will be aware, the London Borough of Hackney, in conjunction with the London Development Agency, is redeveloping a site next to

the former Dalston Junction station as the Dalston Town Centre area. This will include housing, shops and offices, and, crucially for us, a new archives and library facility in a purpose-built building. I have been working with the architects to ensure that all relevant standards are met and, whilst the details still need to be fixed, I am sure that we will end up with a greatly improved facility in a far superior location.

However, the move to Dalston will not take place for several years and in the meantime an interim solution to our chronic lack of space and facilities must be found. I am currently working with a firm of design consultants to produce a plan to address this issue within our present location. As part of this plan, we have obtained an extra portion of the basement of the building which will, with all appropriate environmental controls, form an additional archival storage space. This space will be essential, as the Council is introducing a corporate records management scheme, and we expect in consequence a deluge of documents as old filing systems are reviewed and abolished. Whilst other arrangements have yet to be finalised, it is very likely that we will also have better searchroom space and facilities for the public.

But there's no such thing as a free lunch! In conjunction with the necessary work, the present building will be rewired and the heating system reconditioned. In order to carry this out the service will have to close for an extended period, probably in late summer and early autumn. Friends will of course be kept informed as I get a clearer idea of the timetable.

Outreach

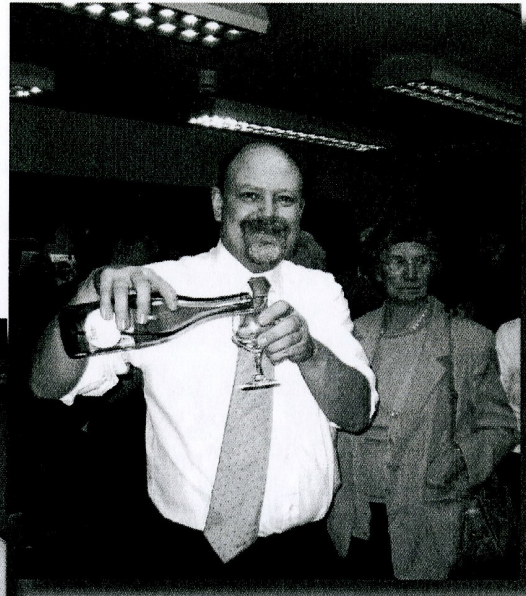
It is fair to say that over the last year, our outreach programme has lapsed. However, with new staff and new premises on the horizon, we will re-establish the Community Archive Forum, which was a joint effort by the Department and the Friends to build better links with those parts of the community who are currently not using archives but who might benefit from doing so. As you will have seen elsewhere in the Terrier, we have an open day on 8th April. Please come along if you can, not only to see 'Theatres of Hackney', the exhibition planned and prepared by Sally and Elizabeth, but also to meet staff, old and new alike.

Ted Rogers
Archives and Information Services Manager

News/events

Friends' Party

We celebrated the Friends' 20th anniversary at a party at Hackney Archives in December. A good time was had by all - see photos below and to the right.



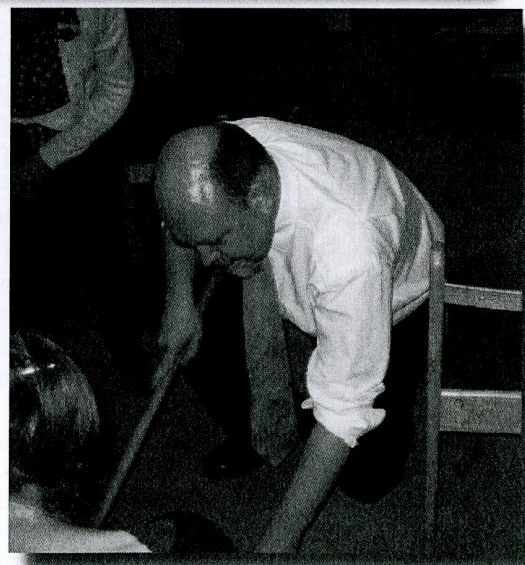
Stalls - past and future

The Friends also provided a presence for Hackney Archives at the East of London Family History Society's extremely well-attended annual fair at Barking in January, and will also assist with the stall at the London Maze local history fair at Guildhall Art Gallery on Saturday 18th March as well as at the annual fete at St John's church gardens on 22 July.



Guildhall Library visit

Following an invitation by Guildhall Library to arrange a group visit, members enjoyed learning about the treasures and facilities of the Manuscripts, Prints and Maps and Printed Books sections of the library. Guildhall Library holds a world class collection of London material, and though much of it is on closed access and produced on request, a considerable collection of mostly modern works can be browsed on the open shelves. There is also an excellent bookshop specialising in works about London. This wonderful library, in Aldermanbury, EC2, is open free of charge and without any need for an appointment, six days a week (though the bookshop, and the Prints and Maps section, are closed on Saturdays). You can search



Well, someone has to do it !

the library catalogue online on www.cityoflondon.gov.uk, where you can also view the 'COLLAGE' image database containing items from the print room and from Guildhall Art Gallery.

This visit was so well supported that two sessions were required to accommodate the demand. In view of its success, we propose to arrange for visits to other archives in due course, so please let me know if there is somewhere you would particularly like to go.

Isobel Watson
Chair

Community Participation Project - update

It was reported in the previous Terrier that Hackney Archives has been selected by ALM London (the regional strategic agency) as one of 8 archives, libraries and museums across London to be part of its "Developing Community Participation Partnerships" project. The project aims to engage archives, libraries and museums in community participation through a process of mentoring by WSA Community Consultants, who have a track record in this field. Libby Adams attended the five sessions on behalf of Hackney, the last of which was on 8th February. A briefing paper is currently being prepared by the consultants, and we understand that ALM London is considering whether to extend the project. Whether this happens or not, the project so far has certainly been beneficial and we hope, over the course of the next year, to begin putting some of what Libby has learnt into practice and to start developing new community participation partnerships in Hackney.

Obituary: Barbara Ray (1928-2005)

The death was announced in the Guardian on 10 November last year of Barbara Ray, teacher, writer and local historian, David Mander remembers her long association with Hackney Archives.

Although Barbara was a long standing Chingford resident, and associated with the Chingford Historical Society and Vestry House Museum, her father, Charles Rowley, had been a veneer panel maker in the Shoreditch furniture trade, and when I moved from Vestry House to become Hackney's archivist, Barbara

agreed to move her voluntary activities with me, and did some useful indexing of Hackney sources.

I first met Barbara in 1977, when she was secretary of the Chingford Historical Society. At that time relations between Waltham Forest's Library service and the C.H.S. were strained, and an earlier attempt to have the Society deposit their collections with the council had foundered. Barbara had become involved in the Society because she wanted to work on their archives, but she was concerned about the damp and poor surroundings in which they were stored at Friday Hill House. Barbara and I struck up a good working relationship and between us made a second, successful attempt to get the Society to move their collections to Vestry House Museum. The job needed a combination of charm, tact and determination, notably in extracting one painting housed in the living room of one of the members of the Society, a truly formidable woman of pronounced views. It took three of us to extract the picture, one of the more difficult moments I can recall in dealing with depositors, and there was a sense of considerable combined relief when we retreated down the garden path with the painting, task completed.

Thereafter Barbara was able to get her wish and worked on archive indexing. She carried out her own research and produced a thorough history of Chingford's Church of England school, where she taught from 1966 to her retirement in 1983. I was very pleased to be able to suggest that she should write a history of Chingford for Historical Publications, and *Chingford Past* appeared in 2003.

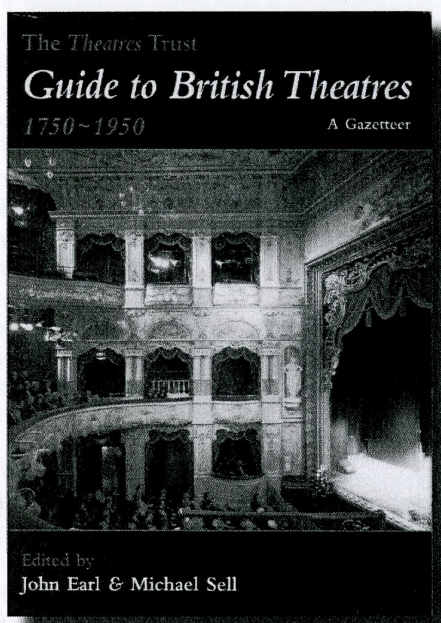
Barbara's work for Hackney included an index for Henry Ellis' *The history and antiquities of the parish of St Leonard Shoreditch....* (1798) and for one of the various Hackney cuttings books. Her volunteering work at the Archives ended with the onset of grandchildren, and the full range of grandmotherly duties.

Barbara was an outstanding volunteer, calm, willing to do what was asked, and thorough in what she did. Through Barbara the Friends were able to involve her husband Don, a pianist and organist, in the musical part of *Hackney Voices*, a selection of edited sources on and about Hackney produced in the late 1980s. It was a pleasure to celebrate with Barbara the publication of *Chingford Past*, a book that will be a long lasting memorial to her love of local history.

David Mander
March 2006

Local Studies Library: new acquisitions

These reviews relate to books recently added to the library collection: HAD does not stock copies for sale.



The Theatre's Trust guide to British theatres 1750-1950 : a gazetteer
Edited by John Earl and Michael Sell
A & C Black (Publishers) Limited
2000

A revised and expanded edition of the work first published in 1982 as *Curtains!!! or, a new life for old theatres*, this guide surveys all surviving pre-1950 theatres, assessing them both architecturally and theatrically.

Three existing Hackney theatres are included. Hoxton Hall earns three stars and is described as 'unique in Greater London and one of the most important early music hall buildings now to be seen anywhere', whilst it is commented that with the Dalston Theatre, restoration might be possible but 'it is difficult to see a demand arising for such a large house in this location'. The Hackney Empire is also given three stars: 'the return of this theatre to variety use has been one of

the most impressive and unlikely examples of theatre revival in recent years'.

The guide also lists lost theatres in its 'Demolitions' section - including such past local glories as the Alexandra, Britannia and Grecian theatres - and gives brief biographies of principal architects and designers such as Frank Matcham, who built both the Alexandra and Hackney Empire.

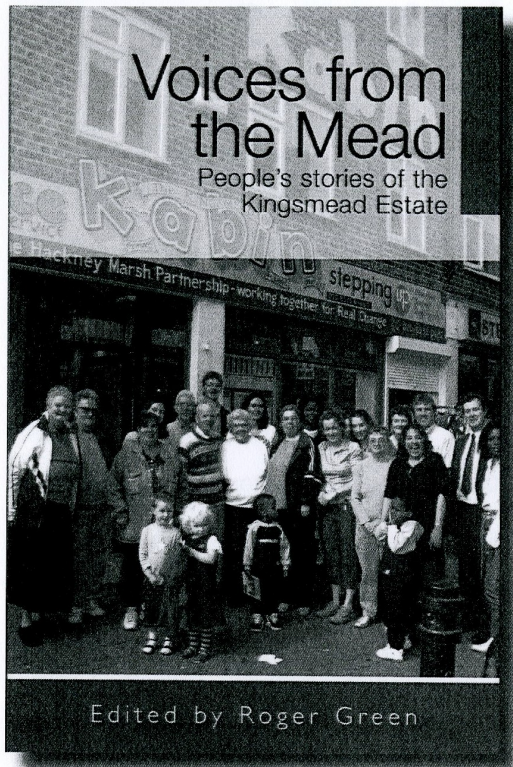
The terrible tale of Ex-Monk Widdows
by Seraphim Newman-Norton
The Seraphic Press, ISBN 1-4116-7191-0
2006

Available from: The Seraphic Press, 10 Heathwood Gardens, Charlton, London. SE7 8EP
020 8854 3090 (price unknown)

This recent donation tells the story of Francis George Widdows Nobbs, born in Norwich Union Workhouse in 1850. Nobbs - or Widdows as he preferred to be called - was not a pleasant character. A convicted sex offender and notorious liar, he created a fictional past which painted him as a victim of religious bigotry. At the same time he managed to preach a brand of anti-Catholic intolerance which, as the author states, 'surely speaks eloquently not only of his own gifts... but also of a religious climate where sectarianism was endemic and charity absent'.

Widdows moved to London in the 1880s and was soon preaching and lecturing in the Hackney area, eventually hiring a disused Baptist Chapel in Speldhurst Road, which he renamed the Martin Luther Chapel. Soon he was being accused of indecent acts and Widdows was facing trial and imprisonment.

Seraphim Newman-Norton has pieced together a forgotten part of Hackney's history from a range of sources, many from Hackney Archive Department's own collection. The story he tells is not only that of Widdows himself, but also of the social and religious climate of the time in the way that the odious if colourful Widdows was accepted and esteemed by so many for so long.



Voices from the Mead - People's stories of the Kingsmead Estate
edited by Roger Green
Arima Publishing 2005

This book was donated to the Archives Department in return for providing images of the estate for publication in the book. It records the stories of residents of the Kingsmead estate, an estate which has been seen by sections of the media and social commentators as one of the most 'notorious' housing estates in England.

These stories tell of personal and family histories, social events, tragedies and communal life with all its ups and downs. Gathered from long established residents, newcomers and people who have now moved off the estate, these individual stories provide an alternative history of the estate and its community.

The material was gathered and edited by Roger Green and staff of the University of Hertfordshire's Centre for Community Research. Other organisations involved in the project include the Kingsmead Kabin and the Hackney Marsh Partnership.

Jewish ancestors? A guide to Jewish genealogy in the United Kingdom
edited by Rosemary Wenzel
The Jewish Genealogy Society of Great Britain
ISBN 0-9537669-7-7
2006
Available from: JGSGB Publications, PC Box
180, St Alban's, Hertfordshire, AL2 3WH
www.jgs.gb.org.uk price £5.95

This new publication is a revised and enlarged edition of the earlier *Beginners guide to Jewish genealogy in Great Britain* designed specifically for the family historian. It offers detailed information on the holdings of record offices throughout the UK, a full list of Jewish cemeteries, and advice on using online resources. It also contains very useful explanations about the different types of records, resources and institutions the family historian may need to consult in the course of their research.

Although the book is obviously of prime interest to researchers of Jewish genealogy, the information it gives and the practical way this is presented makes it of great use and interest to anyone investigating family history.

The Victorian Gardener - the growth of gardening and the Floral World
by Anne Wilkinson
Sutton Publishing
2006

Anne Wilkinson's new book recreates the world of the amateur Victorian gardener which she evoked in articles in *Hackney History* nos. 4 and 5. In the 1860s gardening was mainly the preserve of professionals, who worked on large estates. However a new breed of gardener was emerging - the ordinary householder. The book draws on the vast wealth of contemporary gardening magazines and other sources, including the many gardening books published by the pioneering local gardener and journalist, James Shirley Hibberd.

The book is divided into three sections - The Gardeners, Learning to Garden and Creating the Garden, and covers the different types of gardens, such as the pleasure garden, the water garden and the exotic garden. It is extensively illustrated, and includes reproductions of paintings of the Butters family garden in King Edward's Road, Hackney.

How well do you know Hackney ?

Answers to be published in the next issue of the Terrier.

1. The London Borough of Hackney was created in
 - a. 1965
 - b. 1900
 - c. 1765
2. The London Borough of Hackney was formed by amalgamating three boroughs. Were they:
 - a. Hackney, Hoxton and Stoke Newington
 - b. Hackney, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington
 - c. Hackney, Shoreditch and Stamford Hill
3. The tower in Mare Street is called St Augustine's Tower because:
 - a. It was owned by the knights of St Augustine
 - b. It was part of St Augustine's church
 - c. Because St Augustine once stayed in Hackney
4. Shoreditch was once famous for
 - a. Its museums
 - b. Its menageries
 - c. Its lunatic asylums
5. What was the Castle Climbing Centre on Green Lanes originally built as:
 - a. A debtors' prison
 - b. A stately home
 - c. A pumping station
6. Which famous scientist, who discovered oxygen, taught in Hackney?
 - a. Albert Einstein
 - b. Joseph Priestley
 - c. Isaac Newton
7. Which famous playwright attended the Grocers' Company School on Hackney Downs?
 - a. Harold Pinter
 - b. Samuel Beckett
 - c. Geoffrey Chaucer
8. How old is the New River?
 - a. About 50 years
 - b. About 100 years
 - c. About 400 years
9. Which river forms part of the eastern boundary of the Borough?
 - a. The River Lea
 - b. The Hackney Brook
 - c. The River Fleet
10. Who was arrested for brawling in Shoreditch in 1592?
 - a. Henry VIII
 - b. Christopher Marlowe
 - c. Guy Fawkes
11. What opening did Hackney celebrate in 1850:
 - a. The opening of its first canal
 - b. The opening of its first railway
 - c. The opening of its first motorway
12. During the 1830s, which was Hackney home to:
 - a. The largest hothouse in the world
 - b. The largest cigar factory in the world
 - c. The largest elephant in the world

With great regret, we note the sudden death of Olga Robertson, a good Friend and supporter of the Archives.

Credits & Contacts

The Hackney Terrier, which appears at least three times a year, is published by the Friends of Hackney Archives and produced by Elizabeth Green. The Friends constitute an independent charity (no. 1074493) and membership is open to all: the subscription is £10 in the UK (plus £2 for each additional member at the same address) and £20 sterling overseas. The subscription runs for a calendar year and includes a copy of the journal *Hackney History*.

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